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ABSTRACT

The university for the third age (U3A) began in 1973 when a professor organized a summer program for retired persons at the Universite des Sciences Socialies, Toulouse, France. The Toulouse model included a weekly public lecture on a major topic of concern for older persons, discussion groups, seminars, and recreational facilities, taking advantage of the university facilities. The model also provided for medical research relating to the physical quality of life in later years. Since 1973, the U3A concept has been implemented in countries around the world. An analysis of French U3A clientele and programs for 1980-91 shows that: 70.6% were women; the typical U3A attracted teachers, those who had been denied the opportunity of furthering their education, junior employees, and housewives; there was low participation among farmers and laborers; and programs were a mixture of activities. Among the accusations that can be leveled at U3A are elitism and age segregation. (RM)

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U3A: A FRENCH MODEL FOR THE LATER YEARS

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U3A: An international movement

Philippe Aries in his L'enfance et la vie familiale sous l'ancien régime (Paris 1960) drew attention to the discovery of childhood in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and related this to the growth of schooling. In the late nineteenth century the concept of adolescence emerged, and some would argue that adolescence has been the preferred age of the mid-twentieth century. But we are perhaps on the brink of an even more dramatic change in our perception of the human life-course with the emergence, in the late-twentieth century, of what the French have chosen to call the Third Age, "le Troisième Age". As defined by Serge Mayence, "le troisième âge est la periode de la vie où ayant cessé toute activité professionelle, l'homme et la femme disposent d'une autonomie complète". In other words, it corresponds to retirement from "the world of work", but it includes an assertion that this is a whole new age, with its own validity to be established. It is to be distinguished from "le quatrième âge", the fourth age of renewed and increasing dependence on others. There is moreover a great deal of demographic justification in the sociological perception of this as a whole new age, without historical precedent, for although it would seem that three-score years and ten (or by the latest calculations four score years and fifteen) has always been mankind's optimum lot, never before has such a large proportion of the population had reasonable expectations of attaining it. In the late twentieth century the statistics point clearly towards the dramatic increase in the proportion of the population of most industrial countries over the age of 65. For most OECD countries this is between 10% and 15% and rising towards an anticipated stabilisation by the middle of the

twenty-first century at around 18%. Quite simply, then, more people are living longer, and moreover they are reaching the later years in better health and with the expectation of ten to fifteen years of relatively active retirement before the decrements of aging begin to make any significant imposition upon them.

Educational gerontology is a newcomer in the field of gerontological studies. Quite naturally social gerontology and geriatrics have tended to be concerned with the deficits of aging. Education is by definition concerned with opportunity and growth, and these qualities are implicit in the definition of a Third Age. This paper will be concerned with a movement initiated in France which is among the more interesting experiments in education for the Third Age.

The term Université du Troisième Age was proposed by Prof. Pierre Vellas, of the Université des Sciences Sociales, Toulouse, in 1973. Initially Prof. Vellas organised a summer programme, in May and June, for retired persons. The Toulouse model included a weekly public lecture on a major topic of concern for older persons, discussion groups, seminars, and recreational activities taking advantage of the university facilities. Vellas was also interested in the opportunity for research, particularly medical research relating to the physical quality of life in the later years. Initially perhaps there was nothing exceptional about this programme, apart from the fact that one section of a large provincial university had taken an interest in the problems of aging, and decided to enlist the facilities of the university in a programme for seniors, which would at the same time provide some returns in helping to define the needs of older persons. The initiative came from the university; the resources and facilities were used when the demands of the regular student population

were low. What is of importance is that the initiative in Toulouse struck a rich vein of motivation, and a local summer experiment which developed into a year round programme became the seed-bed of an international movement.

From 1973 in Toulouse the proliferation of the U3A concept has been phenomenal. Almost immediately the idea crossed national frontiers, to Charleroi in Belgium in 1975, to Bern and Geneva in Switzerland, to Warsaw in Poland, to Italy, and to Spain, and across the Atlantic to Sherbrooke in Quebec and San Diego in California. In 1975, as a result of discussions at Charleroi in 1974, an International Association was founded at a congress in Toulouse, and since then it has held annual congresses in different centres: Lille 1976, Toulouse 1977, Namur 1978, Nancy 1979, Sherbrooke 1980, and Madrid 1981. By 1981 the association counted over 170 member institutions. The latest recruit is Britain, with a U3A proposed in Cambridge in June 1981, and other centres following suit in the months thereafter.

Interestingly, it was not until December 1980 that any national organisation was established in France, with the creation of the Union Française des Universités du Troisième Age (U.F.U.T.A.), under the presidency of Prof. Frentz of Nancy, and with a secretariat hosted by the M.G.E.N. Club des Retraités de la Région Parisienne, under the care of M. Pierre Brasseul, first Secretary-General. In contrast to the normal French tradition, the U3A movement has been primarily provincial and decentralised, with strong international tendencies from its inception.

The U3A is rightly described as an idea and a movement. Each centre, of which there are now over 60 in France, is a local

foundation and a uniquely local variant of the theme. Indeed one of the problems faced by the International Association and now in France by U.F.U.T.A., is the definition of what qualifies for membership and what kinds of programmes and organisations are eligible to use the term. It is a touchy question of tempering enthusiasm with credibility. In France several patterns are found. Some follow the original Toulouse model, and have been established as extensions of a U.E.R. (Unité d'Enseignement et de Recherche), the indisciplinary units established in the post-1968 reforms. In Toulouse, Prof. Vellas is a law professor in the U.E.R. Etudes Internationales et Développement. Some have been established as separate constituents of a University (Centres, Institutes, or Colleges) and others come about through association between a university and a government or municipal department responsible for the welfare of older persons. Several are the direct creation not of a university but of local government, and the allocation of funds to such an institution has been featured in local government election programmes. Some, and of these a prime example is Grenoble, are wholly independent associations. In the case of Grenoble Prof. Michel Philibert, of the Centre Pluridisciplinaire de Gérontologie was a prime mover in the introduction of the idea in January 1976, but the U3A is self-directed, and in effect negotiates with the various university centres in the town, primarily Grenoble II, Sciences Sociales, for the programmes it wishes to set up. In Paris, the programme at Nanterre (Paris X) is a cooperative venture of the MGEN Club des Retraités (a retired teachers' association) and the University's Institute d'Education Permanente.

Although in some cases U3A's have been announced without any connection to a "normal" university, this is discouraged and university liaison is generally accepted to be an essential ingredient. What differs therefore is the location of origination and direction between an established university and the constituency of third age students. The underlying theme is the liberation of resources available within a university for the use of older persons. But this focus on seniors too has changed as the idea has developed. Part of the original purpose, as much as providing for the educational needs of older persons, was to improve the understanding of living in the emergent Third Age. Reflection on this leads to the realisation that age per se is not really the defining principle. The situation of older persons in contemporary society is characterised by the availability of time and the loss of social status by separation from the world of work. It is interesting to note the ways in which the realisation of the broader potential of the U3A is expressed, when concern for the needs of one particular social group which is initially defined by age is translated into recognition of the social forces that create similar needs for other ages too. Thus we find the "Université du Troisième Age et du Temps Disponible" at Nancy, the "Université du milieu de la vie et du troisième age" of the Institut catholique in Paris, the "Université du Troisième Age et pour tous" at St. Etienne, the "Université Tous Ages" at Lyons, the "Centre Universitaire Interâges" at Grenoble, and the "Université Populaire du Troisième Age" at Mulhouse. It is clear that, in addressing the needs of the later years, these institutions have begun to identify broader social issues, in connection with which retirement and chronological age are only partial, and not

exclusive, characteristics. The following kinds of phrases appear in various foundation manifestos: - "to arrest decline (i.e. postpone the quatrième âge)...to make use of new opportunities...to democratise culture...to demystify education...to compensate for past inequality".

The Third Age then begins to take on issues of cultural deprivation and social disadvantage, which I have explored elsewhere,* and it is apparent that in many places the proportion of younger people is growing, as the programmes draw in not only early retirees, but others who are excluded from the labour force for various reasons, social restraints, unemployment, or physical handicaps. Nevertheless the dominant focus remains the later years. A fairly typical student age profile is that from the U3A Orleans, 1980-81: - Under 55, 3.4%; 55-60, 18.4%; 60-65, 25.8%, 65-75, 45% (equally balanced either side of 70); over 75, 7%.

U.F.U.T.A. is preparing analyses of French U3A clientèle and programmes in order to establish a comprehensive profile. At the time of writing I do not have this information, but the 1981 annual report of M. Ostrowetsky, University of Orleans faculty advisor to the Orleans U3A, is instructive:-

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* "Third Age Education: Questions that need asking". Paper delivered at the GSA/CAG Conference in Toronto, October 1981, and to be published in a forthcoming issue of Educational Gerontology.

Table 1. Growth of the Orleans Programme

	1977-8	1978-9	1979-80	1980-81
Enrolled	444	703	770	844
Teachers Participating	41	59	91	139
Course hours	2,455	3000	4,500	5,380
Av. Course hrs/stud/wk	2-3	3	3	3+
Activities listed	34	62	118	177

Of the 844 students in 1980-81, 596 (70.6%) were women, 248 (29.4%) men. M. Ostrowetsky notes that this female to male ratio of 70/30 has held steady as enrolment has grown, and my own impressions suggest that it is fairly typical. The female to male ratio of the French population over 60 is 60/40. It would be interesting to investigate sex-related differences in attitudes to the use of time in the later years in French society.

Orleans also provides an analysis of participants according to former occupation:-

Table 2. Enrolment at Orleans 1980-81 by Former Employment

Ouvriers et personnels de service	(labourers, service)	20	2.3%
Employé(e)s	(junior employees)	176	20.8%
Cadres moyens	(middle management)	83	9.8%
Cadres supérieurs	(senior management)	78	9.2%
Professions libérales	(professions)	25	2.9%
Enseignant(e)s	(teachers)	164	19.4%
Ruraux Agriculteurs	(farmers)	7	0.8%
Patrons, Industriels, Commerçants	(independ. business)	30	3.5%
Autres Categories	(others)	20	2.3%
Divers	(various)	46	5.5%
Sans profession (surtout femmes)	(No profession, mainly women)	195	23.1%

From this breakdown three groups stand out, marking two distinct interests in the opportunities afforded by the U3A programme. One is teachers, who

presumably are conditioned to and have an abiding interest in education, and in the social amenities of an educational environment. The other interest is a combination of those who had been denied the opportunities of furthering their education beyond the secondary or incomplete secondary level, junior employees and housewives. The typical U3A seems to attract students who have at least two to three years of lycée education, and who regard the programme as a chance to resume and round out an education that was earlier cut-off by social circumstances.

In passing we might note in the Orleans figures the low participation among labourers, and farmers. There is a growing concern in some centres about a certain elitism in the formation of the U3A, which leads to an almost missionary sense of responsibility, towards the educationally deprived elderly in the cities on the one hand, and on the other hand, since most U3A's though provincial are located in urban centres in relation to a formal university, towards the rural areas. One answer is the creation of what are known as "antennes", outreach programmes or literally "feelers", which range from satellite programmes in neighbouring communities, to special volunteer schemes to bring courses or activities to elderly "shut-ins". The programme established at Paris VII illustrates another initiative to identify and attract a section of the population which might not otherwise take advantage of the U3A opportunity. In 1979 the municipality invited the Parisian universities to consider the needs of the more disadvantaged elements of the older population, such as those aided by social welfare programmes. The suggestion did not meet with a ready response, but in considering the question, the staff at Paris VII identified a group that fell between those who already made use of

existing university extension programmes and were not daunted by them, and those who were satisfied with the intellectually passive old people's clubs with their atmosphere of "tricote, parlotte, belotte" (knitting, gossip and cards). To meet this need the University signed an agreement with the Caisse de Retraités Complementaire de Non-Cadres, a supplementary pension programme to create a programme for retired production-line workers in industries such as Renault and Dassault/Aerospatiale. This is another example of the formation of a U3A, to add to those mentioned earlier, in this case related to the recruitment of, and provision for, a particular socio-economic group.

Fees at U3A are less of a constraint than social conditioning and acquired perceptions of educational opportunity. They appear to have been very successful in attracting the voluntary or nominally compensated services of lecturers and teachers, or persuading host or affiliate universities and their faculties that this is a reasonable allocation of time. Space is not always easy, and much depends on the use of shared or scrounged facilities when available. The problem has become more pressing as programmes have moved from unused space during vacations or evenings, to regular, daytime year-round programming. However enrolment costs are generally still less than fr. 100 per year. In Orleans where the basic fee in 1981 was fr. 70, there is a supporters association numbering about 480 persons (out of 850 enrolled) which managed to donate or raise about fr. 45 extra for each paid-up member of the total enrolment, so there is a clear indication of commitment among those who can afford it to extend the benefits to others. Nanterre operates a sliding scale, from fr. 0 to fr. 500 based on tax status. Generally speaking enrolment fees will

admit participants to all the main lecture series, but they will be required to pay for the use of materials in arts classes for example, and for instruction in particular courses of study. In Grenoble where the basic fee in 1981 was fr. 50, foreign language courses charged an extra fr. 6 per hour. Again, the variety of local arrangements makes generalisation impossible, and financing varies considerably, but it is clear that a great deal of ingenuity has been used in persuading formal universities and municipalities to allocate both space and time, and in the raising of funds. Thus Orleans cannot be taken as typical, but the budget for 1980-81 was fr. 284,590. Of this expenditure 56% was for teaching, and 44% for Administration. The administration budget included 19% Secretariat, 5% Accommodation, 2% Travel and Liaison. Receipts were 23% from fees, 49% from the Town of Orleans, and the remainder in various forms of aid and donations, including the supporters club.

U3A programmes are a mixture of activities. These range from the opening of regular university courses for third age participants to special programmes designed and developed specifically for them. Grenoble organises a series of regular open lectures on topics of general interest, access to university courses, special language courses (French, English, German, Spanish, Russian) and courses in the plastic and graphic arts and photography. There are workshops in choral music and music appreciation, and a study group that meets regularly to discuss the frontiers of contemporary scientific investigation. There are also various clubs for, among other things, literature, the cinema, relations with foreign students (for whom Grenoble is a centre in France) and intergenerational reflection

on current social problems. Besides this there are various educational visits and tours. Grenoble has a separate sports association, A.S.T.A. (Action Sportif Troisième Age) but in many centres physical health education, using pools and gymnasia, is a major part of the programme.

In general U3A programmes exhibit a mixture of open lecture series, negotiated access to established university courses, specifically contracted courses, study groups, workshops, study excursions, and physical health programmes. The course content is mainly in the humanities and arts, and on social issues, but there is also an interest in the research potential of the U3A, and several informants stressed the point that this is one element that justifies the use of the term university. The programme at Toulouse maintains a strong interest in the study of the medical aspects of aging and the maintainance of good health, the U3A of Nancy has conducted research on learning in the later years, and a group at Orleans is conducting a study on the social role of the U3A. Besides the study of various aspects of aging, the experience and perceptions of older persons are elicited in oral history and recent historical research. A group at Nanterre under the leadership of Dr. Maximilienne Gautrat completed and published a study on La Médecine Familiale au debut du Siècle (Editions Scientifiques et Juridiques, 1978), and groups at St. Etienne are working on Customs of Childhood, School and Learning, and Daily Life during the Second Republic. Thus the U3A is not merely seen as something to fill up leisure time, but as an institution with an active responsibility to enhance the quality of the later years, and to define the responsibility of older persons, as the repositories of experience, towards the larger society.

As this paper has suggested, it is difficult to generalise about the U3A. The term contains an idea, a seed which has spread with remarkable rapidity since its first propogation in 1973, which has taken root in diverse locations, and flowered in different ways according to locality and circumstances. As one enthusiast noted, it took France several centuries to establish 77 traditional universities and seven years to establish 63 Universités du Troisième Age. In terms of programmes the U3A is not perhaps entirely unique, and parallels can be drawn with some of the activities of the Scandinavian Folk High Schools, with University Extension and the Workers Educational Association in Britain, or with tuition-waiver programmes in the U.S.A. What is perhaps unique is the decentralisation of development in the French content, and to use Paolo Freire's term, the element of conscientisation, and the sense of enthusiasm, together with international outreach. In 1978-79 the programme was introduced into Spain through pilot programmes in Madrid and Palencia, and rapidly proliferated into 24 centres across the country. A British version was proposed at a meeting in Cambridge in June 1981 and a national organisation formally launched in London in November of the same year; it now lists seven contacts. Canada has four institutional members of the International Association, and the U.S.A. seven. Definition is certainly a problem, but it is apparent that U3A has located a learning constituency of considerable social significance. U3A's are still in the first flush of enthusiasm, most of them being not more than four or five years old. Soon the founder members may be due for some relief from the mainly volunteer and pioneering administrative duties, and it will be interesting to see how the structures cope

with such changes. Also, traditional education has not been open-ended but instead marks out a cycle of learning through which an individual passes, moving on with a diploma or qualification of some kind. The rewards of the U3A are different, for they come from personal satisfaction and social relationships. In some places there are apparently signs of "silting-up", as early participants who have taken their first round of courses and programmes wonder what to tackle next, or whether to go round again. Repetition, not because of failure but because it was so satisfactory the first time, means that there are problems taking in new adherents. This is a situation which is just beginning to be encountered, and it speaks of the need to define the role of the U3A within the lenghtening span of the later years.

Among the accusations that can be levelled at U3A are elitism and age segregation. Are they perhaps super-clubs, with a conscious intellectualism which not only disparages the anaesthetic activities of other older persons clubs and associations, but also drains the more active leadership which provides whatever animation such clubs do enjoy? Do older persons want or need their own educational programmes, and will the U3A reinforce age segregation? In fact there is encouraging evidence that the U3A's are very much alive to the issue of social responsibility, and social insertion as contrasted with social segregation, and the problem is primarily the development of techniques and strategies for assuring a socially responsible role.

As one notes the expression of these concerns in the formulation of names referred to earlier, one cannot escape the conclusion that the main contribution of the U3A, besides its re-valuation of the role of the

older generation, will be pressure that the movement brings to bear, from the other end of the life-course, on the realisation of life-long education, and like so many developmental institutions, the measure of success of the idea may well be a time when the U3A is no longer needed.

A note on sources

In preparing this account I have relied primarily on a file of personal notes, records of conversations, brochures, flyers, manifestos, memoranda, and initial reports gathered during a visit to France in May 1981, and also antecedent and subsequent correspondence. In view of the diversity of this material I have excused myself the discipline of formal citation, but wish to make the following acknowledgements, while taking upon myself responsibility for any errors of fact or interpretation:-

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My list of published sources used in this paper is short but valuable:-

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